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AUTHOR McLean, Dulce DiDio
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ABSTRACT

Recommendations and special concerns related to the development of a library skills program for international students at the University of Toledo Libraries are discussed in this feasibility study. The paper is organized into four main parts: (1) a description of the study framework (methodology, assumptions, purpose of study, and definition of a library user education program); (2) a summary discussion of the aspects to be considered in the development of a user education program; (3) insights on international students' backgrounds, in general and at the University of Toledo; and (4) a description of the suggested user education program based on the factors analyzed in the preceding sections. An annotated list of references used is appended. (SW)

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TITLE: LIBRARY USER EDUCATION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT : A FEASIBILITY STUDY

NAME AND AFFILIATION OF THE AUTHOR: Dulce DiDio McLean, Associate Professor of Library Administration; Assistant to the Director for Research, University of Toledo Libraries, Toledo, Ohio

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ABSTRACT

Topics and concerns as they relate to the development of a library user education program for the academic international student are discussed. Insights are presented on the background and problems of this growing student population in the American institutions of higher education. A library user education program for the international student at the University of Toledo is delineated, including the identification for future validation of important basic assumptions for the development of such library instructional programs.

Feasibility for the purpose of this study may be defined as an assessment of the various aspects and problems related with the development of a library user education program[1] for the international student (i. s.) to ensure its successful implementation.[2]

Some of the factors that influence the feasibility of such a program may be recognized as being: philosophical, relating to the acceptance of the library's role within the educational system; educational, relating to the academic teaching environment in existence; economic, working with library and university budgeting and expenditures; human, showing the availability of expertise, motivation, etc.; qualitative, leading to the effectiveness of the program; organizational, communicating the needed resources and changes; technical, requiring methods and materials for implementation; political, relating to the interest of the academic community; and timeliness, stressing relevancy and most favorable time for carrying it out.

Some of these aspects are emphasized in this paper; others are assumed or not addressed.

This paper is organized into four main parts: (1) a presentation of preliminaries -- methodology, assumptions, purpose of the study, and definition; (2) a summary background discussion of the aspects and topics to be considered in the development of a user education program; (3) insights on the i. s. background, in general, and at the University of Toledo;

and (4) a description of a user education program for the i. s. at the University of Toledo taking into consideration the factors brought out in the preceding sections.

P R E L I M I N A R I E S

METHODOLOGY

(A). A selective review of the literature to uncover as many backgroung topics and problems as they relate to the development of a user education program for the academic i. s.[3]

(B). Development of a background rationale for devising a user education program suitable for the i. s.

(C). Interviews with selected staff of the American Language Institute (ALI) of the University of Toledo and with the Foreign Student Advisor to assess the problems and needs of the i. s. for such a program.

(D). Mail inquiry on the availability and development of similar programs at selected institutions of higher learning.[4]

It seemed proper to first explore ideal and general concepts in relation to a user education program and then collect data at a local level for the practical application of these concepts.

ASSUMPTIONS

(A). The program is to attempt to obtain results leading to the use of the skills by the students while in school and, after graduating, during their professional lives.

(B). Basic library skills are essential for professional development. All students will be presented the opportunity to develop their library skills to the required level of competence.

(C). Such a program is to be flexible, to respond to changing needs and to allow for alternatives. It serves a changing population in which changes are to be monitored.

(D). For the success of the program, it is necessary to persuade the teaching and library faculty of its necessity; and to involve, whenever feasible, faculty and administration in its implementation and evaluation.

(E). Educational change cannot be achieved without psychological and mechanical preparedness for it. Problems are anticipated no matter how much preparation, due to the difficulty of bringing about change.

(F). Some procedures will have to be modified under working conditions.

(G). The funding for the human and materials resources is available to meet the budgetary needs that will occur when the user education program is extended to these type of students.

(H). There is commitment to adopt innovative practices if needed to extend this program.

(I). Library user program is a vital part of the university's educational program.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the various aspects and issues related to the development of a user education program for the i. s., and to suggest a plan of activities for such a program at the University of Toledo.

DEFINITION

In very broad terms, a library user education program may be defined as a group of activities to teach the patron, either formally or informally, to use the library and its resources.

U S E R E D U C A T I O N P R O G R A M :

BACKGROUND ASPECTS AND TOPICS

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of a user education program for the i. s. are: the i. s. will be prepared to effectively use the American academic library and its resources, in general; the i. s. will be instructed on how to use the American academic library, and the most recent as well as the old resources that have relation to his/her field of specialization; the instructional program will allow for the differences in background of the i. s. coming from different countries and from levels of different social strata the instructional program will use a variety of methods to provide information gathering skills experience; and the instructional materials will be developed to meet the special needs of the i. s.

FUNCTIONS

The basic supporting functions required for the development of a user education program for the i. s. are: the instructional functions, dealing with the setting of objectives, delivery

methods, production of materials, etc.; the managerial functions, involving the generation of data, budgets, selection and development of personnel, dissemination of information, etc.; and the evaluative functions, concerned with the review and adaptation of the program.

PHASES

Three distinguishable educational phases are recognized: a phase of orientation to the library and services to the newcomer; a phase of instruction in the use of the library for the student assigned library related coursework; and a phase of particularly designed instruction for the student with specialized library and information needs.

INSTRUCTIONAL ASPECTS

(A). Unless, not feasible, instruction strategy and evaluation of results will be based on observable and measurable objectives.

(B). The instructional phases are arranged to meet the educational needs usually developing from a general to a more specialized level of proficiency. Individualized and group instruction may cut across all phases. Despite the advantages of certain methods of instructional delivery, an ecclectic approach is necessary for the program's university-wide acceptance, and for meeting the educational needs.

(C). Instructional activities are planned for the student's development of library skills involving subject matter as well as attitudes.

(D). Instruction is provided within an environment which facilitates interaction between the student and the instructional staff.

(E). Specialized instructional materials are designed if needed.

(F). Library faculty and staff receive in-service training to prepare them for instructional and/or support tasks, if needed.

POPULATION/PROBLEMS

A continuous assessment of the population to be served, of the instructional staff and resources available, and of research in the field, shows the demands for this program.

Special developments and problems in relation to such a program that have to be managed are: pressure and increase in reference services, in use of library personnel, space, hardware, facilities, etc.; lack of time to develop instructional materials, of leadership and staff; training of personnel for development of special skills; poor inderdepartmental communication and relations; and the changing of library policies and practices.

The involvement of the teaching faculty, providing for their acceptance of the user education philosophy and practice, is a challenging part of the program.

RELEVANCE/ASSESSMENT

An information data base for record keeping and program monitoring is needed to identify data for educational purposes.

Also, the record of performance criteria, instructional alternatives used, demands of faculty/library time, facilities,

equipment, and research data serves as the basis for the program review. Faculty reports, student/faculty feedback, interviews (solicited or unsolicited), observations, tests results, support system views, etc., provide materials for a continuous assessment. An assessment is needed as guidance to revisions, to the superseding of materials and procedures, and to judge the overall efficiency of the program.

Immediate relevancy is effected by changes in the program through evaluation, research, student, faculty and support personnel feedback and coordination with other parallel bibliographic instruction activities. Far-reaching relevancy is achieved by the redefinition of the user education program's purpose, after checking whether students and faculty are pleased with the education itself.

The exploration and use of efficient methods contributes to educational high quality.

RESULTS

The design, development and testing of basic materials; administrative commitment, motivated faculty, library inter-departmental cooperation, and cooperation between the library and academic faculty are needed for the success of the program.

If such a success is achieved the user education program will reveal some results in terms of teaching and learning outcomes, possible modification of library and teacher roles, weighing the factors that lead to efficient instruction, examination of the administrative organization and logistics that support instruction among others.

THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

INSIGHTS ON BACKGROUND AND PROBLEMS [5]

GENERAL

The initial period of adjustment to meet college requirements is difficult for the American as well as for the i. s. However, the i. s. also has to go through adaptations to different values, customs and language.

In general, the i. s. experiences difficulties and problems when attending American institutions of higher learning, due to differences in cultural and educational backgrounds. He has to adjust to American life and academic environment, and at the same time learn library skills.

The main problems that exist may be categorized as language (for the nonEnglish speaking i. s.), culture, education, and library related.

(A). The knowledge of the English language is a needed skill for a student attending an American classroom. Even after passing proficiency examinations, the nonEnglish speaking i. s. still might have slower reading and comprehension speeds.

The key area of concern for the i. s. is time since more is needed for him/her than the American student for reading, study, thinking, and writing.

(B). Some i. s. have a great potential to be developed and have a willingness to work hard to attain their goals. But, usually feelings of pride, shame, and fear of failure underlie their shortcomings. They may not ask the instructor

or librarian for assistance because are unsure of the propriety as to how to approach them. They tend to minimize their difficulties but might admit to difficulties when addressed on specific points.

There is a general unfamiliarity with the American system of life and education. The i. s. finds that professor expectations, methods of teaching, assignments and examinations are different from those at home. He is presented with special problems such as the taking of notes from a fast speaker; unfamiliar jargon; inability to skim and scan for lack of reading and writing fluency; inability to express ideas and subtlety of thought clearly in the writing of research papers and in the taking of essay type examinations, because of writing skills deficiencies; writing problems due to cultural influences; lack of experience, reading and vocabulary skills in the taking of objective types of tests.

(C). Libraries in foreign countries, in general, are smaller, have outdated books, do not own most of the American bibliographic tools, and do not offer open shelves and self-service.

The concept of library service also is different; the library mainly offers a place to study and the reference function is not emphasized in the American way. The educational role of the library is not fully realized.

One of the main problems is that of catching up with the knowledge of resources available in the American libraries since they are new to the i. s.

In general, the i. s. has the same problems that the American student has, in the use of the card catalog, in the understanding of subject headings and of the Library of Congress classification, and so on. However, these problems are deepened by the other differences in background.[6]

A study[7] of 265 i. s. from 17 American institutions of higher education investigated whether programs and services available to these students met their needs. Among the areas of inquiry were orientation programs including that to the library.

Fifty-nine percent of the total sample indicated as first preference the taking of special English courses to become familiar with testing procedures and course requirements for a general orientation to academic work.

The library tour, the special orientation course, and self-learning were tested to check on their value to the i. s. in his/her acquaintance with the library and competency in its use.

Fifty-four percent of all i. s. felt that they had poor or fair ability to locate library materials. The course in library use had no visible results in improving this ability. This reflects on the course adequacy to meet its goals and on the need to make strong efforts towards this objective since those who took the course were expected to have had less difficulty in the use of the library.

(D). In general, the graduate i. s. is expected to perform at the same level as the American student; he is perceived as being among the best and the poorest of the

graduate students; he is found to be more theoretical and analytical, less mechanical and practical, more hard-working and industrious than the American student. In general, the graduate departments do not provide orientation and counseling for the i. s.; they do not accommodate the special needs and problems of the i. s.; and only a few i. s. serve on departmental committees.[8]

THE UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO[9]

The University of Toledo population of i. s. consists of approximately 300 students coming from about 50 countries as of Fall 1978 data. These countries are mostly from the Middle East and Latin America. This data refers to students at the undergraduate and graduate levels; with or without scholarships; having or not having English as a native or second language.

Eighty-three percent of the 107 students who attended the ALI during its first year of operation (1977/78) enrolled at the University of Toledo.[10] ALI teaches English as a second language to prepare students to meet admission standards to American universities.

Among the requirements for the student's acceptance into the ALI are the completion of secondary education and a limited knowledge of English. ALI provides the i. s. with an intensive English program of lectures and laboratory, including instruction of library skills. Many of these students are sponsored by their own governments and come to America to develop a special expertise. In this case, knowledge of English is not a requirement for the sponsorship as long as they are thought to be suited for the special expertise.

USER EDUCATION PROGRAM:

UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

OBJECTIVES

The objectives for a user education program for the i. s. are parallel to those, in general, for the American student.

(1). The i. s. will be introduced to the library and its resources.

(2). At appropriate levels, the i. s. will be instructed on how to use the library and its resources, in general, and as it relates to his/her field of specialization, in particular.

(3). The cultural and educational backgrounds that make the needs of the i. s. special, will be taken into consideration in the selection of methods, types, materials of instruction, services, and so forth.

ACTIVITIES [11]

The program consists of activities planned to reach these stated objectives. Participation in these activities is voluntary, although the i. s. is strongly urged to participate. The i. s. evaluation of these activities after participation is a requirement.

(A). Activities That Introduce the I. S. to the Library and Its Resources.

These are aimed particularly to the population new to the university and the library. They may be waived for the i. s. coming to the University of Toledo via ALI.[12]

(1). Specially prepared fliers about the library for the i. s., for inclusion in his/her registration packet, and for distribution through the Foreign Student Advisor's office, the international student associations, and the library information services.

(2). Library and information releases to the i. s. describing services, policies, and so on.

(3). Library multilanguage glossary for the various i. s. groups at the university. This tool to be used by the students as well as the librarians and instructors when dealing with the i. s.

(4). Public relation contacts with the international student associations and inclusion of library news on publications issued by these organizations, if any.

(5). Special tours of the library.

(6). Library orientation plays an important part in the adjustment of the i. s. to the American academic life. It is necessary to avoid giving the i. s. too much information too early. The i. s. might feel frustrated when being oriented to the library together with the American student.

This orientation must be special, given to small groups, with stress given to practical aspects and those of particular interest to the i. s.

The orientation emphasis is on the physical location of resources and services; basic policies and procedures for the use of materials inside and outside the library; special services such as availability of carrels, and so forth; and the importance

of consulting the reference librarian for assistance.

The orientation considers the use of temporary bilingual directions, graphics, and materials; and the use of translated self-guided tours (especially in Arabic and Spanish).

A special orientation is devised for the graduate students with the emphasis toward his/her subject specialization. An alternative is to have a second part appended to the general orientation session devoted to the special aspects of interest to the graduate student.

(B). Activities to Instruct the I. S. on How to Effectively Use the Library and Its Resources.

(1). Instruction is planned as a noncredit mini-course in the use of the library. This is aimed at the freshman, sophomore populations, plus new students at any level.

The course contents are: the use of the card catalog, central serials record file; locating special rooms, departments, services, materials; retrieval of books, periodicals, microforms, and so forth; use of general reference sources; In Process List print-out; Library of Congress subject headings list; Dewey and Library of Congress systems of classification; special services; use of machines, etc.

(2). Independent special courses and/or workshops and/or seminars in library and research skills, by broad fields (i. e. science, social sciences, humanities, and so on). This is directed at the senior and graduate populations.

This makes use of lecture presentations; examination of resources covered; of practical assignments; sample term papers preparation; oral reports; and special open question and answer periods.

(3). An alternative is to provide this content within the framework of the delivery of bibliographic instruction by subjects. The library subject specialist identifies the i. s. in the class to single out those for more individualized attention if needed. Special classes are offered, if there is a group of interested students available.

SPECIAL ASPECTS

(A). The user education program for the i. s. will attempt to check the validity of the following instructional related issues [13]:

(1). The need to provide individualized instruction as intense as possible. As the other option, should the i. s. learn to cope and compete?

(2). The use of bilingual materials and instructors is very helpful for the orientation and instruction of the non-English speaking i. s. On the other side, the use of materials and instruction in English will make the i. s. learn the language faster. The underlying question is: Is the library to teach the i. s. the English language, or to assist the i. s. in the best way possible to learn library skills? Of course, the knowledge of the language will affect these skills.

(3). The library instruction given beyond that to the American student is advisable, as well as the development of special skills for the teaching of nonEnglish speaking students. Since the i. s. is in the United States to have an American educational experience, should he/she be asked to adapt under

pressure to the learning ways of the American higher education? Or, should he/she, by extra attention and consideration, be facilitated to acquire as much content education as possible?

(4). Since one of the objectives of the user education program is to develop independent information users, should the program be concerned with the adaptation of what the i. s. learns when they return to their countries?

(5). There is a need for descriptive information about the usefulness of materials used in the teaching of library skills to the i. s. The same applies to the methods for validating the i. s. user education. Are tests to be given in the i. s. native language as well as in English?

(6). There is a need for special materials and personnel with the knowledge of languages that can teach and service the i. s. Is this a requirement for the success of a user education program to the i. s.?

(B). Due to the barely existent literature as it relates to the library needs of the i. s., an attempt is to be made while delivering this instruction to survey the i. s. needs, either formally or informally, for dissemination of results.

(C). An acceptance strategy is needed to achieve understanding, cooperation and strengthening of commitment within the university: orientation of the library faculty and staff toward this subprogram; public relations work to get the support, reactions, from the Foreign Student Advisor, international student organizations, and teaching faculty; obtaining the participants feedback to program and instructional details.

(D). The success of the program mainly depends on its relevancy. As means to achieve this relevancy the staff involved in the instruction delivery keeps informed on changing needs, appraises innovative methods, makes known the results of research at the library and university levels, and uses a flexible approach.

The staff also will develop an information data base to keep records and monitor the program. Among other records this base will store a profile of the i. s. background for use as basis for testing, instructing, and evaluating. If not all, at least a sample of students will be inverviewed to collect information on educational background, library use experience, personal interest, and so on. This profile is essential for the development of the program itself, to identify the i. s. in the university, his/her background, interests, and needs.

The i. s. evaluates the individual courses and the overall program. This assessment is indispensable, especially, if one considers the variety of backgrounds that this program activities will attempt to reach.

(E). Special Treatment and Consideration.

(1). Library consultation or counseling services for the i. s. at all levels of instruction.

(2). Provision for assessing the needs of the i. s. at the library and teaching departments levels.

(3). Attention on how the i. s. can use these skills in his/her home educational environment; and on how to reveal the importance of the academic library for the i. s. to succeed in college and professional life.

(4). Calling the attention of the library administration/staff and teaching department/faculty to the needs of the i. s.

(5). Relaxation of the library rules when dealing with the i. s., if necessary.

(6). View of the reference work to this population as a teaching function. Attempt to judge the i. s. needs at the same time that information is provided.

IMPLEMENTATION

(A). Implementation follows a flexible plan and adapts to particular needs. In general the sequence is:

(1). Identification of the i. s. and profiling of the i. s. user.

(2). Activities to introduce the i. s. to the library which may parallel or follow the identification and profiling steps. Within these activities, a preliminary tour may precede a more thorough library orientation to be given later.

(3). Activities to instruct the i. s. in the use of the library, in general, will follow the activities to introduce him/her to a specialized area of library use.

(B). The timing of the instructional delivery and the amount of such instruction are to be carefully judged to avoid educating the i. s. earlier or later, and more or less than necessary.

The responsibility for the user education program for the i. s. may fall upon a specially assigned library faculty member for the activities of a general character and upon the library subject specialist for the special bibliographic instruction

sessions.

Very important qualifications for the faculty involved with the i. s. are the knowledge of foreign languages, empathy and a good personal feeling about foreigners in general. Where language expertise is not available, assistance from graduate students and/or teaching faculty in the preparation of instructional materials involving the language is to be sought.

REFERENCES

1. It will be referred to as a user education program throughout.
2. This does not show intention to preclude the need for a continuous assessment after adoption.
3. "Bibliographic Instruction: A Checklist of the Literature, 1931-1975", "Library Orientation and Instruction, 1973-77" (as published in the Reference Services Review); Education Index, 1970-78; and the ERIC data base (10/17/78) were searched with limited results.
4. Institutions contacted with partial results were: Howard University; University of California at Los Angeles; University of Colorado; University of Kentucky; University of Louisville; University of Michigan; University of Texas at Austin; and Project LOEX, Eastern Michigan University.
5. Based on Mary G. Lewis, "Library Orientation for Asian College Students," College & Research Libraries, 30 : 267-72 (May 1969); Martha J. Maxwell, "Foreign Students and American Academic Ritual," Journal of Reading, 17 : 301-5 (Jan. 1974); A. R. Hagey and Joan Hagey, "Meeting the Needs of Students From Other Cultures," Improving College & University Teaching, 22 : 42-4 (Winter 1974); on interviews with the Foreign Student Advisor, ALI staff at the University of Toledo; and on personal experience and observation.
6. Some students attend orientation centers before starting classes in American institutions.
7. Hagey, "Meeting the Needs of Students From Other Cultures," p. 42-4.

8. An Inquiry Into Departmental Policies and Practices in Relation to Graduate Education of Foreign Students (Cleveland : National Association for Foreign Students Affairs, 1972), p. 6, 30. ERIC ED097853.

9. Based on interviews with the Foreign Student Advisor, selected ALI staff and on personal experience and observation.

10. "Scores of Foreign Students Learn English at CEC Language Institute," UTopics, 2 : 7 (Sept. 1978).

11. Some activities were selected from Lewis, "Library Orientation for Asian College Students," and from University of Texas at Austin, General Libraries, A Comprehensive Program of User Education for the General Libraries (Austin : The General Libraries, 1977), 109 p., of which the reviewing was very informative.

12. Interviews with selected staff at the ALI revealed a need for reinforcement in the teaching of library skills for these students.

13. A user education program for the i. s. at the University of Toledo may be used as a pilot program to validate some instructional related perceived premises and assumptions that are very important and the basis for the development of such a special instructional program in the first place.